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## SOME NOTES ON THE DECORATION OF ITALIAN MAJOLICA

TODAY, photography and other forms of mechanical reproduction make it possible for an artist to keep in close touch with the work of brother artists throughout the world. But in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries conditions were very different. Then, particularly in the smaller and less important cities, the artist was very largely dependent for his knowledge of the work of other artists outside his own locality upon such drawings and engravings as might come his way.



THE DEATH OF DIDO  
LUSTRED GUBBIO PLATE  
SIGNED BY MAESTRO GIORGIO, DATED 1522

It is not difficult to imagine with what eagerness some provincial artist, who had heard tantalizing accounts of the divine Raphael's fame—tantalizing, because words are a poor substitute for works of art unseen—would seize upon a print by Marcantonio after the master's design, or better still, upon an actual drawing from Raphael's hand. Even in the great art centers, it was a common practice for artists to collect the drawings of others. These drawings, we know, played an important part in the education of young artists. To meet a demand which could not be satisfied with original drawings alone, the engravers were called in to mul-

tiply designs. Typical examples of Raphael's work, for instance, were widely circulated through the engravings of Marcantonio Raimondi and others of his school.

These drawings and engravings, which comprised not only pictorial compositions but also ornamental designs, were especially prized by the craftsmen of the period. Together with the woodcuts in illustrated books, they formed an abundant treasury, from which the humble craftsman could draw at will.

Italian majolica painters were particularly given to borrowing their designs from various sources. The practice flourished notably in the sixteenth century, when the "istoriati" wares, with subjects after Raphael and his school, enjoyed great favor, although it was by no means confined to this period, since, in not a few instances, the designs on fifteenth-century majolica have been recognized as copies. In general, it may be assumed that very few pictorial compositions, as distinguished from purely ornamental designs, are the wholly original conceptions of the majolica painters. The use of borrowed material was not always the same. Sometimes we find a print copied with practically no modifications. On the other hand, the painter may have introduced important changes, perhaps in the direction of elimination, or he may have combined in one composition parts from two or more different sources.

There are on exhibition in the Museum (Gallery H 14), through the courtesy of V. Everit Macy and Mortimer L. Schiff, two remarkable loan collections of Italian majolica. A brief examination of the majolica in these collections has afforded material which may be of interest in connection with the preceding general remarks.

Since print experts are not in accord as to the exact date of the celebrated series of Florentine engravings known as *The Prophets* and *the Sybils*, it would be rash to venture upon any more precise statement than that these prints would appear to date from the last third of the fifteenth century. A print from this series was copied, early in the sixteenth century, by

the artist who decorated a large pharmacy vase in the Schiff Collection. The principal decoration of this vase, a typical example of Faenza ware, consists of two circular fields with figure compositions. In one of these, the Prophet David is represented holding his harp and seated on a throne-like bench. The David is copied, with slight changes in the drapery and accessories, quite obviously from the engraving of the same subject in the Florentine series already mentioned. On the opposite side of the vase, the artist has ornamented the circular field with a figure of Apollo, freely copied after the Apollo Belvedere (engraved by Nicoletto da Modena, Marcantonio, Agostino Veneziano, and others).

A large Caffaggiolo plate, dating from the early sixteenth century, also in the Schiff Collection, is decorated with a pictorial composition that is copied from a print by the Florentine engraver, Cristofano Robetta, who flourished in the last years of the fifteenth century and the first part of the sixteenth. The subject of the plate is Adam and Eve. The artist has added, not very successfully, the trees which appear in the background, and the girdles of leaves worn by our first parents; otherwise the print has been copied fairly accurately. The rim of the plate is decorated with the arms of the Medici and Lanzone families.

A lusted Gubbio plate signed by Maestro Giorgio and dated 1522, in the Macy Collection, is a splendid example of a large class of Italian majolica decorated with designs after Raphael. The scene represented on this beautiful lusted plate is *The Death of Dido*. The Carthaginian Queen stands beside a tree trunk, holding in her right hand the dagger with which she is about to kill herself. At the right is a funeral pyre—the flames brilliant with ruby lustre. The design is copied, quite faithfully, from a print of the same subject by Marcantonio Raimondi (Bartsch 187). Marcantonio worked at Rome from 1510 to 1527. The Dido is said to have been the first plate engraved after Raphael's design by Marcantonio, shortly after his arrival in Rome; the success of the Dido led to the

engraver's further interpretation of Raphael's work.

Two Urbino plates in the Macy Collection offer additional evidence as to the popularity of Raphael. One of these, a lusted plate of the sixteenth century, represents *David Anointed by Samuel*. The design has been copied, presumably through the intermedium of an engraving, from Raphael's fresco, painted about 1516-1518, of the same subject in the



THE DEATH OF DIDO  
ENGRAVING BY MARCANTONIO RAIMONDI  
(BARTSCH 187)

Vatican. The majolica painter has omitted several minor figures from Raphael's composition, and made a few other changes. He does not appear to have been particularly gifted as an artist, since the drawing of the altar, which seems to float in mid-air, is, to say the least, careless.

The other piece is a large plate, dating about 1530-1545, by a close follower of Fra Xanto. The ambitious figure composition which decorates this plate represents Aeneas bearing on his shoulders his aged father, Anchises, as they flee from the sack of Troy. The principal group, Anchises, Aeneas, and his son, Ascanius, has been copied from a group in Raphael's fresco of

The Fire in the Borgo, painted in the Vatican, 1514-1517. The majolica painter probably used an engraving of this subject after Raphael by Jacopo Caraglio. On the rim of the plate, at the right, is the figure of a seated, nude woman, which has been copied from a print by Marcantonio (Bartsch 344) based on Raphael's design of Cupid and the Three Graces, for his Cupid and Psyche frescoes in the Villa Farnesina at Rome; painted in 1516-1517. The print dates about 1518.

That the majolica decorator was sometimes indebted to other sources than engravings or woodcuts, is shown by a small, lusted Gubbio bowl, purchased by the Museum in 1884. This bowl, which dates about 1535-1550, is possibly the work of Maestro Prestino. It is decorated with a low relief in the bottom of the bowl, representing the Madonna, in half figure, holding the Child. This relief has been taken from a well-known bronze plaquette in the manner of Giovanni da Pisa, who flourished in the middle of the fifteenth century. There is an example of this bronze plaquette in the Museum collection. Another bowl, with the same relief decoration, is in the collection of Frank L. Babbott of Brooklyn.

J. B.

## BOOKS ON ORNAMENT

COMPARATIVELY speaking, very little attention has been paid to the cataloguing of ornament. Where the catalogues of pictorial engravings are many and elaborate, those of ornament are few and in most cases so concise as to be little more than shelf lists of bound collections. Many of the important books of ornament seem never to have been collated in such a way as to make possible an accurate statement of what they should actually contain. As it is, probably the best and most easily available catalogues are the following:

D. Guilmard's *Les Maitres Ornementistes*, Paris, Plon, 1880. The second volume of this invaluable book is composed entirely of plates reproducing typical engravings, while the first contains lists of designs arranged by the names of the

designers under century and school. This covers more ground than any of the others, and in spite of its obvious defects, largely due to the fact that it was the first in the field, is still the canonical book on the subject.

The Katalog der Ornamentstich-Sammlung des Kunstgewerbe-Museums, Leipzig, Seeman, 1894, is a catalogue of the collection in the Kunstgewerbe Museum in Berlin, and describes 2,638 numbers, which are arranged by subject matter and country. The book is illustrated with two hundred reproductions of engraved ornament, and is made doubly useful by its elaborate indexes. It is further valuable because it contains either collations and measurements or references to the various catalogues of prints, such, for example, as those of Bartsch, Andresen, and Robert-Dumesnil, in which the designs have been described. The following is a typical entry: "622. Flindt. Dieses Buch mit 40 stücken eingetheilet Fecit Paulus Flindt Nürnbergensis A<sup>o</sup> 1594 Friderico Dürerij Noribergensis: Excud: Titel u. 39 Bl. Gefässe in Punzenstich, bez. P. V. N. Nagler, Mon. IV, 2950 Nr. 2. Titel u. 31 Bl. sind im Katalog Coppenrath Nr. 922, 877-896, 898-907, 920. Schalen, Humpen, Kelche, Becher, Agleibecker, Pokale, Nautilusbecher, Kanne, Ampel, Leuchter, Trinkfiguren.

The Illustrierter Katalog einer reichhaltigen Sammlung von Ornamentstichen und Zeichnungen, etc., issued by Ludwig Rosenthal, the Munich bookseller, as his catalogue No. LXIX. This trade catalogue, which contains about sixty illustrations, describes 1,918 numbers in the way that is customary with the great German booksellers, wherever possible giving references to other books in which the items have been described or reproduced, the following being an entry taken at hazard:—"366, Boyvin R. (1530-80?). L'histoire de Jason et de Medée ou la conquête de la toison d'or. Suite de 15 (au lieu de 26) gravures s. cuivre.—15 (statt 26) Darstellungen aus der Geschichte Jasons, in prächtigen Bordüren. Paris, chez E. Desrochers. In-4° obl. Demi-rel. Guilmard p. 22. Rob. Dum. nos. 39.